

NWRS/Biology  
WM 2.6  
Mail Stop 60130

To: Director  
Assistant Director, National Wildlife Refuge System

From: Regional Director

Subject: Chronic Wasting Disease Accountability Report

This memorandum is to meet the Director's reporting requirements set out in his May 2005 memorandum regarding Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) FY05 funding allocations. That guidance included "a reporting requirement for the use of these funds that clearly explains how these funds were expended. Please submit this report to the Director and Assistant Director of the National Wildlife Refuge System by November 1, 2005".

Overview:

CWD remained in the national spotlight during FY05 as new discoveries of the disease occurred in free-ranging cervids in New York, West Virginia and Alberta, Canada. The disease continues to be a high priority item for state wildlife conservation agencies.

Our FY04 efforts focused on development of Refuge and Fish Hatchery-specific CWD surveillance and response plans (see CWD accomplishment report, November 2004), resulting in 28 field stations developing site-specific CWD plans. In FY05, the Mountain-Prairie Region received \$205,000 in CWD funding in late spring FY05 (a reduction of more than \$5K from FY04). As in FY04, we were directed to use the funds to 1) develop and implement Regional CWD surveillance and response plans, 2) support logistical needs associated with surveillance and management, and 3) implement Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) responsibilities of the joint States/DOI/USDA CWD implementation plan including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). An additional FY05 requirement of all Regions was to develop some form of CWD response plan.

Our eight-state Region has five states with endemic CWD in wild cervids and an additional two states that have had CWD-affected captive cervids. Because of the endemicity of the disease and high variability across the Region funding was sufficient only to address highest priority needs. Many of the projects summarized below are on-going and collaborative with states. Funding was provided for technical assistance (\$10,000), completion of site-specific CWD surveillance and response plans within the Region (\$27,000), and implementation of management and research projects at Refuges, Hatcheries and Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Offices (\$168,000).

**Technical Assistance** (\$10,000): With the new discoveries of CWD in the northeast US, part of our effort in FY05 was to provide considerable technical support to the FWS Northeast Region in the form of on-site workshops and management meetings and technical expertise in development of their regional and initial site-specific CWD refuge plans and management responses. We will continue to support the Northeast Region in FY06 by applying our CWD Risk-Needs Assessment (see FY04 accomplishment report) to their field stations to assist in prioritizing their CWD funding across the Region and revising their regional response plan. We also provided assistance to Southeast Region through review and revision of their regional CWD response plan.

Our technical assistance also provided guidance to our field stations in developing site-specific CWD plans and implementation projects, and maintaining our CWD database.

We continue to provide field managers and biologists, Regional managers and Washington staff up-to-date information on the status and progress of Chronic Wasting Disease through regular “Disease Update Alerts”. We also participated in the second International CWD Symposium in Madison, Wisconsin.

**\*FTN CWD/general herd health surveillance (on-site), sent R5 our RNA for evaluating their risks.**

**\*Provided guidance/updates to field stations. Gave 3 phone interviews about CWD**

**Planning** (\$27,000): We focused FY05 funding on development of CWD surveillance and response plans at the 7 field stations that did not develop plans in FY04. Six of those 7 plans have been completed and the remaining 1 will be completed in early FY06 (Table 1). Plans produced this year covered remaining Refuges and the Montana Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office (MFWMAO). The MFWMAO provided assistance to the Crow, Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Fort Belnap, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne, Rocky Boy’s and Blackfeet Tribes in development of a comprehensive CWD surveillance and response plans. Their over-arching plan has Tribal-specific step down plans. The 3 stations mentioned in our FY04 Report as not completing CWD Plans all completed their CWD plans this year without additional funding. As mentioned last year, knowledge, distribution, and epidemiology of CWD are constantly changing and we consider these plans to be living documents that will require revision as local circumstances and knowledge change.

**Implementation** (\$168,000): Remaining funding was allocated for management implementation, including surveillance, preparedness, CWD responses, and for applied research projects at stations with completed CWD plans. We solicited project proposals in January 2005 from all stations with finalized plans with two caveats: proposals had to address key elements in the station’s CWD plan, and proposals had to be complementary to, supported by or cooperative with state CWD activities. We received 26 proposals for this funding and had sufficient funds to implement 18 projects. The funding allocation process was competitive, and we ranked proposals on 11 criteria including evidence of state support, feasibility, applicability to the station, management significance, and cost effectiveness. A list of some of the accomplishments from these projects includes:

1. CWD surveillance was conducted on several Refuges in cooperation with their respective states. Our field stations are integrated within each state’s surveillance efforts so that data are consistent across broad landscapes. In most cases GIS layers were created with geographically explicit surveillance data and shared with the state. Locations such as the

National Elk Refuge, with nationally significant cervid resources, have elevated surveillance to have high confidence of detection of low prevalences of CWD.

- **FTN sampling in December of (22 animals)**
  - **NER collected 196 elk samples from the Jackson Herd Unit**
2. Aerial and ground censusing of cervid population numbers and densities was completed on several Refuges. These projects collected data in cooperation with the state using methodology consistent with state censusing efforts.
    - **Bowdoin WMD observed deer on 33% (4/12) WPA's**
    - **Crescent Lake NWR finding more deer than estimated.**
  3. Crescent Lake cooperated with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on a research project using radiotelemetry on deer from the Refuge and known CWD endemic areas to assess movement of CWD on the landscape and risk to Refuge cervid populations.
    - **"Getting good data" on bi-weekly flights**
  4. Ft. Niobrara NWR is a range-restricted fenced Refuge with bison, elk and deer populations. The Refuge conducted a risk assessment of their boundary to determine where risk of CWD incursion is highest and how those risks might be mitigated or prevented.
    - **Will be conducted this fall**
  5. Sully's Hill National Game Preserve is also fenced and has bison, elk and deer populations. Using motion camera technology, the Preserve conducted a boundary risk assessment for CWD incursion.
    - **No cervids recorded crossing barriers but cross fence contact was recorded**
    - **Cervids recorded near barrier on both sides of the fence 80% within, 20% outside.**
  6. Sully's Hill National Game Preserve also partnered with North Dakota Game and Fish Department to monitor risk to Preserve cervid resources. The Preserve partnered with the North Dakota Board of Animal Health to modify the entrance gate to the Preserve to eliminate transboundary movements of cervids and mitigate incursion of CWD onto the Refuge.
    - **Bids are out right now with completion estimated before 10/1/06.**
  7. Jones Hole NFH conducted a CWD educational campaign with their nearly 10,000 visitors. The Hatchery provided ancillary support to the Utah Department of Wildlife Resources for CWD surveillance and participated in CWD training with Department staff.
    - **Continued distributing CWD information to visitors**
    - **Monitored cervid populations estimates up to "several thousand" observed.**
  8. The Lander Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance office cooperated with the Shoshone and Arapaho Tribal Fish and Game offices, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in surveillance for CWD on the Wind River Reservation.
    - **Continued surveillance on Wind River**
  9. Quivira NWR has contracted with Kansas State University to evaluate existing Refuge deer census data, and develop a statistically valid methodology for evaluation of deer populations, distribution and movement.
  10. The Rocky Mountain Arsenal cooperated on a research project with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) to assess genetic susceptibility of RMA deer (both white-tailed and mule deer) to CWD. Preliminary data suggest certain genotypes may be more resistant to CWD, but their low frequency in deer populations suggest that other factors may make these

genotypes less fit. Captured deer were blood sampled and biopsied for PrP genotype, radiocollared and released. Telemetry information will allow the Refuge and CDOW to evaluate deer health, habitat use and survivability in relation to genotype.

- **Collection of samples from road kill animals**
- **Installation of a new cattle guard**

**Current Status:**

We have CWD surveillance and response plans covering almost all Refuges in Region 6, along with plans for 2 Fish Hatcheries and several tribes through cooperation with 2 state Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Offices. Implementation of research and management projects is well underway, but barely initiates the actions we have programmed into our plans. Cooperation and coordination with the states has been exceptional. Only one funded station remains to complete their planning effort and we anticipate that by mid-December 2005. Again funding in FY05 arrived late and constrained our ability to effectively utilizing CWD funds. As in the past, though, our field stations rose to the occasion and in a few short months implemented a number of projects to effectively assist states and tribes in addressing CWD while protecting wildlife resources of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We plan to use FY06 funding to complete implemented projects and to address action items identified in station CWD surveillance and response plans. CWD is more widespread than in previous years and we also plan to continue our national leadership role and provide assistance to other FWS Regions in their effort to deal with CWD. To effectively accomplish those tasks, we need FY06 CWD allocations as early in the fiscal year as possible.

**Attachments (2 Tables)**

cc: w/atts.

Casey Stemler, Special Assistant to Director

bcc: all w/atts.

Mike Stempel, ARD, Fisheries

Steve Berendzen, Refuge Supervisor, MT/WY/UT

David Wiseman, Refuge Supervisor, KS/CO/NE

Rod Krey, Refuge Supervisor, ND/SD

Bob Barrett, Deputy Refuge Supervisor, ND/SD

Wayne King, Regional Biologist

Table 1. Region 6 CWD Surveillance and Response Plans

Completed in FY05:

Fish Springs NWR

Bear River NWR

Cokeville Meadows NWR

San Luis Valley NW Complex

Native American Tribal plans with Montana FWMAO

Kirwin NWR

To be completed in FY06

Lee Metcalf NWR

Table 2. Region 6 CWD Implementation Projects Funded in FY05

<b>Location</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Sully's Hill NGP	Risk assessment of transboundary cervid movements and development risk mitigation measures	\$11,100
Rocky Mountain Arsenal	Determination of PrP genotypes as related to relative fitness and CWD resistance using RMA deer populations	\$7,100
Ft. Niobrara NWR	Risk assessment of CWD incursion and development of risk mitigation measures	\$10,400
Ouray NWR	Development of active surveillance program on Ouray NWR	\$9000
National Elk Refuge	Increased sensitivity in surveillance for CWD on the National Elk Refuge	\$8896
Crescent Lake NWR	Aerial surveys to determine movements, distribution and intermixing of nearby CWD-affected and Refuge mule deer populations at Crescent Lake NWR using radio-telemetered deer	\$26,000
Lander FWMAO	Increase the CWD surveillance sensitivity by ten-fold on the Wind River Reservation	\$10,900
Charles M. Russell NWR	State-federal cooperative CWD surveillance program on the CMR NWR	\$18,420
Quivira NWR	State-federal cooperative cervid population estimates on Quivira NWR	\$6,800
Benton Lake NWR	Development of a passive CWD surveillance system on Benton Lake NWR	\$7,000
Jones Hole NFH	State-federal cooperative CWD surveillance near Jones Hole NFH	\$2,130
Crescent Lake NWR	Increase in the number of radiocollared mule deer to improve sensitivity for detection of CWD risk to Crescent Lake NWR	\$17,750
Ft. Niobrara NWR	Aerial surveys to determine population size and distribution of cervid populations on and around Ft. Niobrara and Valentine NWRs	\$7,817
Crescent Lake NWR	Personnel cost support for monitoring of radiocollared mule deer on Crescent Lake NWR	\$11,700
Charles M. Russell NWR	Preparation of an environmental assessment for proposed CWD response on the CMR NWR.	\$7,500
Sully's Hill NGP	Improved barrier to cervid movements onto Sully's Hill NGP at the main highway	\$2,200
Ft. Niobrara NWR	State-federal cooperative CWD surveillance near Ft. Niobrara NWR	\$4000
Sully's Hill NGP	Supplies for active CWD surveillance on Sully's Hill NGP	\$585